

## The Sin Of Fear (Part Two)

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In the previous article, we saw that fear and unbelief are sins; that fear has many destructive effects; and that unbelief, a lack of faith, is the source of fear. Even though fear is a natural part of human nature, God commands us to "fear not" repeatedly in the book of Isaiah (41:10, 13-14; 43:1, 5; 44:2). As we fight our personal battles, why should we not fear? Why should "fear not" be a controlling factor in our lives? Notice Joshua 1:9 (*Contemporary English Version*): "I've commanded you to be strong and brave. Don't ever be afraid or discouraged! I am the Lord your God, and I will be there to help you wherever you go."

Do not *ever* be afraid! God will help *wherever* you go! That is why we should not fear—God is with us; He is for us. Fear calls God a liar and denies that He will keep His promises. Fear rejects God and such promises as found in Hebrews 13:5-6:

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Fear, when not controlled, gives evidence that a person does not believe that God is telling the truth and that He cannot be trusted to have one's best interests at heart. This rejects Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you," says the Lord, "thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." To leave no doubt, God reassures us that He wants the best for us, peace and a future with Him forever.

No matter what problems we face, God has a glorious end-game in mind for us. Christ points to it in Luke 12:32 as a reason not to fear: "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The end-game for this physical life is only the beginning of the next—eternal life. Our God, with all the power at His command, is committed to getting us there, as I Thessalonians 5:23-24 reveals: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also *will do it*" (emphasis ours throughout).

Our God is not passive in His love for us but is actively looking for opportunities to do us good, assuring us in II Chronicles 16:9, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him." Not only is it God's will to be a present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1), this verse in II Chronicles also reveals that He takes it much further. God is with great effort, illustrated by running to and fro, actively looking for opportunities to help us. Kiel and Delitzsch says of this verse, "[He] looks forth over all the earth, uses every opportunity wonderfully to succour those who are piously devoted to Him."

So knowing that God is looking for *every* opportunity to help us, we should be able to relate to Psalm 121:

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who

keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.

With all these promises, why do we have fear? We will fear if we do not make God's promises part of our thinking or lack the faith to believe them.

### **The Fear Paradox**

While we see that fear is an enemy, it is a paradox that a Christian must have fear. It just has to be the right kind of fear, as Christ teaches in Luke 12:4-5:

And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

While the wrong kind of fear can lead to eternal death, the right kind of fear leads to eternal life: "Fear of the LORD is a life-giving fountain; it offers escape from the snares of death" (Proverbs 14:27, *New Living Translation, NLT*).

The benefits of the right kind of fear are not limited to the distant future and the promise of eternal life, but it also has great benefits for the here and now for us and even our children after us, as the following scriptures indicate:

- » For the reverence and fear of God are basic to all wisdom. Knowing God results in every other kind of understanding. (Proverbs 9:10, *The Living Bible*)
- » The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. (Psalm 25:14, *Revised Standard Version*)
- » And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." (Exodus 20:20)
- » Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. (Psalm 34:9)
- » He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. (Psalm 145:19)
- » By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life. (Proverbs 22:4)
- » For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him. . . . As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. (Psalm 103:11, 13)
- » In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge. (Proverbs 14:26)

» They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. (Jeremiah 32:38-40)

### Another Paradox

Another paradox is that while human fear is an enemy, it is also a blessing. Fear is a natural human emotion. God created that emotion in us, and He declares that what He creates is good (Genesis 1:31). What can be good about the wrong kind of fear? To answer that question, consider the subject of pain. God created pain also, and anyone in the throes of agony would be hard pressed to believe that it was good. To illustrate that pain is a blessing from God—yes, *a blessing*—notice this November 1, 2004, Associated Press article, "Rare disease makes girl unable to feel pain":

Ashlyn Blocker's parents and kindergarten teachers all describe her the same way: fearless. So they nervously watch her plunge full-tilt into a childhood deprived of natural alarms.

In the school cafeteria, teachers put ice in 5-year-old Ashlyn's chili. If her lunch is scalding hot, she'll gulp it down anyway.

On the playground, a teacher's aide watches Ashlyn from within 15 feet, keeping her off the jungle gym and giving chase when she runs. If she takes a hard fall, Ashlyn won't cry.

Ashlyn is among a tiny number of people in the world known to have congenital insensitivity to pain with anhidrosis, or CIPA—a rare genetic disorder that makes her unable to feel pain.

"Some people would say that's a good thing. But no, it's not," says Tara Blocker, Ashlyn's mother. "Pain's there for a reason. It lets your body know something's wrong and it needs to be fixed. I'd give anything for her to feel pain."

Pain is a God-designed warning system, and so is fear. Pain warns of physical problems, and fear warns of spiritual problems. Fear is an indicator of our level of faith. It warns us that our faith and trust in God needs serious attention. Evaluating our fears can help us determine where we need to upgrade our shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16).

What do we fear? What areas of our lives do our fears point to that need shoring up? These questions should at least be a part of the self-examination that we undertake each year in preparation for Passover (Psalm 139:23). Once we answer these questions, the next step is to build up the areas of faith that are weak. How do we do that?

The Bible has answers. "No fear exists where his love is. Rather, *perfect love gets rid of fear*, because fear involves punishment. The person who lives in fear doesn't have perfect love" (1 John 4:18, *God's Word*). This perfect love is recognizing the extent of God's perfect love for us. If we firmly believe in how much God loves us, then why would we ever fear what man or circumstances can do to us (Hebrews 13:6)? If we can identify our fears, we can then begin the process of casting them out by building our faith in His love for us.

Fear and worry signal that we are not yet perfect in our belief in how much God loves us. If we understand John 17:23 (see "Faith to Face Our Trials," *Forerunner*, June 2003) and believe that the God of infinite power and wisdom loves no one in the universe, even Jesus Christ, more than He loves us, then what do we have to fear?

## Combating Fear

What can we do to combat the sin of fear? Psalm 34:4-6 (NLT) answers:

I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me, freeing me from all my fears. Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces. I cried out to the Lord in my suffering, and he heard me. He set me free from all my fears.

What kind of prayer does it take to get that kind of answer from God to free us from fear? John 15:7 begins to answer that: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." Here is a key to answered prayer: His words must abide in us. Published in 1900, *How to Pray* by R. A. Torrey can be beneficial to anyone wanting to improve his or her prayer life (it can be read at [www.whatsaiththescripture.com/Voice/How.to.Pray.html](http://www.whatsaiththescripture.com/Voice/How.to.Pray.html)). In it, Torrey points out how Christ's words abiding in us impacts prayer:

If we are to obtain from God all that we ask from Him, Christ's words must abide or continue in us. We must study His words, fairly devour His words, let them sink into our thought and into our heart, keep them in our memory, obey them constantly in our life, let them shape and mold our daily life and our every act.

This is really the method of abiding in Christ. It is through His words that Jesus imparts Himself to us. The words He speaks unto us, they are spirit and they are life. (John 6:63) It is vain to expect power in prayer unless we meditate much upon the words of Christ, and let them sink deep and find a permanent abode in our hearts. There are many who wonder why they are so powerless in prayer, but the very simple explanation of it all is found in their neglect of the words of Christ. They have not hidden His words in their hearts; His words do not abide in them. It is not by seasons of mystical meditation and rapturous experiences that we learn to abide in Christ; it is by feeding upon His word, His written word as found in the Bible, and looking to the Holy Spirit to implant these words in our hearts and to make them a living thing in our hearts. If we thus let the words of Christ abide in us, they will stir us up in prayer. They will be the mold in which our prayers are shaped, and our prayers will be necessarily along the line of God's will, and will prevail with Him. Prevailing prayer is almost an impossibility where there is neglect of the study of the Word of God.

Mere intellectual study of the Word of God is not enough; there must be meditation upon it. The Word of God must be revolved over and over and over in the mind, with a constant looking to God by His Spirit to make that Word a living thing in the heart. The prayer that is born of meditation upon the Word of God is the prayer that soars upward most easily to God's listening ear.

Torrey's points are the same ones we have heard often—study, meditation, and prayer, with only fasting not included in his comments. In Matthew 17:19-21, Christ validates this approach to building faith:

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast [the demon] out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

Fasting and the kind of prayer that Torrey describes, requiring much study and meditation, are the tools God has given us to deepen our relationship with Him. We build relationships by intimate contact over time. We get to know the person in such a way, and that builds faith in who he is. Through these relationship-building tools, we develop a deep knowledge of God, which is the essence of eternal life (John 17:3).

Paul gives us the order of things in I Corinthians 16:13: "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong." "Watch" is the effort to spend time with God (Matthew 26:38-41). That effort and time builds the faith that conquers our fears so that we can be brave and strong as we face life and its many challenges.

As we have seen, fear can be both a curse and a blessing. A final paradox is that the right kind of fear is the first step toward conquering the wrong kind of fear. The fear of God motivates us to build an intimate relationship with Him, using the tools He has provided to us. As we work on that relationship, we increase our faith in Him, His Word, and His love for us. This faith, coming only from much study, meditation, prayer, and fasting, is the key to conquering the sin of fear.